

Stedfastness in Religion recommended.

IN A
Farewel SERMON

Preach'd in

OLD-JEWRY,

TO THE

SOCIETY

OF

CATECHUMENS,

FEBRUARY 23. 1723.

Published at their unanimous Request.

By JAMES WOOD.

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M DCC XXIV.

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TO THE
SOCIETY
Who attend the
Catechetical LECTURE
IN
OLD-JEWRY.

GENTLEMEN,



HIS Sermon was preach'd upon your joint Application, and comes thus into the World at your united Request. If any will pretend to find out in what was deliver'd to you bigotry to a Party Interest, I think they must torture my Words; and am sure they will discover what was wholly foreign to my Design. 'Tis to be hop'd our common Christianity will not be thus charg'd by any who are not sunk into downright Infidelity; I go no further than to wish and endeavour your Confirmation in the Faith once deliver'd to the Saints, and that Holiness of Heart and Life without which no Man shall see the

Lord. For Accuracy and Politeness I never laid Claim to them. You have here the Thoughts of a Friend, who is truly concerned for your Welfare: and I am thankful that (plainly as they are dress'd) they have met with great Candour, nay more, the strongest Proofs of your Affection. May my reverend Father, while he stands under the Burden of this Work alone, be remarkably supply'd, and strengthen'd from above; and every further Provision that shall be made for you, be effectually bless'd by him who alone teaches to profit. May the Evening Exercise you encourage, improve you daily in Divine Light and Knowledge, in Love to God, and an abundance of the Fruits of Righteousness; may you thus be stablish'd, settled, that you may adorn Religion, enjoy much of its Comforts, and ripen apace for that Glory, that is the End of our Faith, and Hope; These are the Prayers

Grays-Inn Lane,
Feb. 26. 1723.

Of your sincere Friend
and Servant,

JAMES WOOD.





2 PETER III. 17, 18.

Yet therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these Things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the Error of the wicked, fall from your Stedfastness. But grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: to him be Glory both now and for ever. Amen.



THE Apostle *Peter* has very honourable Mention made of him, in the *New Testament* History, tho' there are no Footsteps here of that *Supremacy* claimed for him by the Church of *Rome*, in Virtue of which her Bishops as his Successors have long lorded it over God's Heritage.

He appears to have had a quick Apprehension, solid Judgment, great Affection, and a truly laudible Zeal, in the Things of God: and when we think of the distinguished Favours shewn him by our Lord, before his Death, and after his Resurrection, we must allow him to have been a Man greatly beloved.

By a voluntary Agreement among the Apostles, *Peter* has those of the *Circumcision* committed to his Care^a. He was now advanc'd in Years, could not without great Difficulty visit them in Person, because of their Distance from each other,

^a Gal. ii. 7, 8, 9.

for they were scatter'd through the several Cities of the lesser ^b *Asia*. To make Amends for this, he communicates his Mind in the way of circular Letter : In this he principally endeavours, by a variety of proper Arguments, to persuade them to a patient and christian Behaviour under those Sufferings, which were likely to attend their Profession; subjoining fit Directions for their Conduct in Relative Life.

Some learned Men who allow the first Epistle to which his Name is prefix'd, to have had *Peter* for its Author, plead the difference of Style to warrant their excepting against this second Epistle's being pen'd by the same Hand: but when we observe of its Author that he calls himself expressly *Simon Peter*^c, affirms of himself that he is an *Apostle*^d, was one of the *Witnesses* of our^e Lord's Transfiguration, that he had wrote a former Epistle to the scatter'd Strangers; when to this we add that the same *Design* is pursued thro' both Epistles, this latter being professedly indicted for *stirring up their pure Minds by way of Remembrance*^f, there is more than enough to obviate the Objection, even granting the Particular objected to be more strictly true, than it is in Fact.

This holy Man foretels, in this Epistle, the Corruptions in Doctrine and Life that should disturb the Church, when his Head would be laid in the Dust. He takes notice of the *Artifice* and *Subtlety*, by which their Seduction would be attempted, whom he had endeavour'd to establish in the *Faith of the Gospel*, with the *Destruction*

^b Dr. Prideaux supposes the scatter'd Strangers to whom *Peter* writes, to have been descended from those *Jews* who were transplanted from *Babylon*, and placed in the Cities of lesser *Asia* by *Antiochus* King of *Syria*, about 200 Years before the coming of Christ.

^c 2 Pet. i. 1. ^d Ibid. ^e 2 Pet. iii. 1. ^f Ibid.

that should overwhelm those Deceivers. He speaks of some who should run such Lengths of Profaneness as to *banter* the Notion of our Lord's second coming: An Article frequently and expressly mention'd by the sacred Writers; the exploding which opens the Door to all manner of Licentiousness, as one very apt and powerful Motive to an holy Life is taken from the firm Belief of it. He tells us that with plausible but sophistical Reasonings, they would pretend to justify themselves, and make Profelytes of the ignorant and unwary. By way of Prevention, he takes their Arguments to Pieces, shews their Fallacy and Inconclusiveness; and then closes his Letter with the most affectionate Counsels, in order to their remaining *stedfast* and *unmoveable*, maugre the Policy of the more secret and lurking Enemies of the Truth, and all the Essays of its open barefac'd Opposers.

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these Things before, i. e. that the Judge will certainly come, and Scoffers as well as more secret and crafty Hereticks arise, beware lest ye also, whose Settlement in the Doctrines of the Gospel, and in Practical Religion I have faithfully labour'd, being led away as others have been, with the Error of the wicked, fall from your Stedfastness. That so great an Evil may be avoided, grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to whom be Glory both now and for ever. Amen.

I appear in this Place, at this Time, to take my Leave of a Society of young Persons, whose Improvement in sanctifying and saving Knowledge I have endeavour'd through a Course of above five Years Services among them. You can witness for me, that under bodily Infirmities, I have continued in the delightful Work to which you chose me. My Withdrawment from you at last,

is

is not of Choice, but Necessity: *the Spirit is willing, but the Flesh is weak.*

I could not think of any Passage more expressive of my good Wishes for you, than this which I have read. God grant that by the good Fruits they produce, these may appear to have been *Words in Season.*

We'll enlarge upon these Heads as comprehensive of their main Intendment and Design. Such as

I. The Apostle supposes it to be a possible Case, that such as had been under his Instructions, and these bless'd to the best Purposes, might yet be in Danger of so falling into *the Error of the wicked*, as thereby to be mov'd from their *Stedfastness*.

II. He looks upon himself oblig'd to warn them, that they might be upon their Guard, and help to their Establishment by his best Advices. *Beloved, beware, grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

III. He intimates where we are to look for Success, when we have done our Duty, by directing us to whom we should address our Praises. *To him, i. e. to this Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, be Glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

We observ'd

I. 'Tis suppos'd by the Apostle to be a possible Case, that such as had been under his Instructions, and These bless'd to the most valuable Purposes, might yet be in Danger of being led away with *the Error of the wicked*, so as to fall from their *Stedfastness*.

It is not unlikely that this Apostle had been a *spiritual Father* to many of those whom he remembers with so much *Tenderness* in his Epistles. By his personal Ministry they might have been brought to the *Knowledge of the Truth*. The *Stile* he uses won't allow us to doubt of their being truly good; he distinguishes them from the *Erroneous* and *Profane*, using the kind Compellation of *Beloved* more than once in his Addresses to them. Nay, without carrying our Views farther than the Passage before us, we have sufficient to support our Assertion. When he exhorts them to *grow in the Knowledge of Christ*, he supposes them to have already a competent Acquaintance with the Gospel Revelation: as his pressing them to *Advancement and Progress in Grace*, warrants our inferring their being before Partakers of Grace in Truth. And if he did not apprehend them at present come to a good Degree of Stability and Settlement, he would not use the Phrase of their *falling from their Stedfastness*.

Well, these intelligent, gracious, confirm'd Disciples, are not look'd upon as out of Danger, notwithstanding what was written to preserve them, and the good Work already begun in their Hearts. *False Prophets were to arise, and false Teachers who should privily bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them; Scoffers^h, who should buffoon so clear and important a Scripture Truth, as that of the coming of Christ.*

Though we might be ready to think, that the Broachers of such Heresies, would only *foam out their only Shame*; and that the Mention of their Doctrines, was in itself an Antidote against their Influence, the Apostle lets us know that the Case

^s 2 Peter ii. 1.

^h 2 Peter iii. 3, 4.

would prove otherwise in Fact: for that *unstable Souls should be beguiled*ⁱ.

Nay, though these Errors in Principle should be attended with the utmost Diffoluteness of Life, they that spread them *walking after the Flesh, in Riot, and the Lust of Uncleanness*; yet the Apostle assures them that *many should follow their pernicious Ways*, of whom they might *hope better Things*, many by reason of whose Profession, while thus profane, the *Ways of Truth would be evil spoken of*^k.

Now, what Reason can be given for the Apostle's closing his Account, as he does, *Beloved*, I have given you to *know these Things*, that ye might *beware*, if however incautious, and secure, they could not *be led away with the Error of the Wicked*? If such who at present had *sound Understanding*, could not be work'd into a Defection from the Faith by those *who lay in wait to deceive*; if they who had *escap'd the Pollutions of the World, through the Knowledge of Christ*, could never more *be entangled and overcome*; the Caution here given must be needless, and impertinent.

It's true, that God's Love and Covenant are *two immutable Things*. That all shall be *kept to Salvation*, whom Faith has united to the glorious Author of it. Consequently none of those shall die in a *damnable Error*, as *they shall not backslide, with a perpetual Backsliding*. Yet instead of being *high-minded*, we should fear, lest we should be so far left, in both these Instances, as to wound Religion itself, and rob our Souls of the Comforts of it: and this we're then only secur'd against, when we use the proper means for our Preservation. *The Foundation of God stands sure, having*

ⁱ 2 Peter ii. 14.

^k 2 Peter ii. 2, 10.

this Seal the Lord knoweth who are his. Christ's Sheep shall hear his Voice, and follow him, to whom it shall be given, to know the Mysteries of his Kingdom, whom he'll lead into all necessary Truth; yet there is no room to impeach the Veracity of God, if as the Punishment of Carelessness, Negligence, Pride, he should suffer us to fall into Errors of Judgment, or Practice, because there is Duty requir'd on our Part, in doing which, not in the Omission of it, we are to expect the Blessing promis'd on his.

This shall suffice, as to the first Observation.

I go on to the

II. The Apostle looks upon himself oblig'd to warn those, whose Danger he foresaw: and to contribute to their further Establishment by his best Advices, *Beloved, beware (says he) grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Our Lord himself tells some of his Disciples, of whom *Peter* was one, upon their enquiring after the *Signs of the last Times*, *false Christs* should arise, and *false Prophets*, they should do *Wonders*, to seduce, if it were possible, even the *Elect*: but take heed (says he) behold I have foretold you all Things¹. The good Shepherd gives the Signal, when he sees the *Wolf*, and he is an *Hireling* who quietly suffers the *Wolf* to catch or scatter the Flock. The Apostles fear'd not the odious Characters of *hot* and *uncharitable*, but exhorted every Man, warned every Man, as those who would keep themselves pure from the Blood of all Men.

Probably *Peter* might have told many of these profelyted *Jews viva voce* of the Corruption and De-

¹ Mark xiii. 22, 23.

fection that should happen in the Church: However, it shall not be in their Power to say they were seduced for want of having notice of their Danger; they shall have fair Warning under his Hand, who was now about to leave the World, to be a Memorial to all after Ages, of his Affection and Fidelity.

Under this Head, we may profitably speak to these two Particulars.

First, I'll open this Advice given by the Apostle as to the *Matter* of it.

Secondly, I'll shew you its Aptness and Propriety.

I. as to the Substance of his Advice, it may be resolv'd into the following Heads.

First, He advises them to be upon their *Guard: to watch and pray, that they enter'd not into Temptation.* This is much the same with that Caution Paul gives the *Corinthians*, *let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall^m.* 'Twas while Men slept, that the Enemy sow'd his Tares: and if we would not run into hurtful Mistakes in Doctrinals, swallow Poison instead of the *sincere milk of the Word*, we should *prove all Things*. Weigh what we hear in the Balance of the Sanctuary: try it by the Standard. *To the Law and to the Testimony, if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in themⁿ.*

Be mindful (says Peter) *of the Words which were spoken before by the holy Prophets, and of the Commandment of us the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour^o.* Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God. Now, must not our Senses be spiritually exercis'd, if we would

^m 1 Cor. x. 12. ⁿ Isai. viii. 20. ^o 2 Peter iii. 2.

thus *P* distinguish between Good and Evil? between the Doctrines of Christ, and the Commandments of Men? our Spirits are the Lord's; with these we glorify him, when we labour to see the Evidence accompanying his Truths; that the Instructions given us are indeed the Word of God, which we then receive in Faith, and in the Love of the Truth. Such Wariness and Caution won't contribute a little to your Stability in the Principles of Religion.

'Tis necessary in our general Conduct, to keep up our Watch. If we would not be betray'd by the evil Heart of Unbelief, into Departures from the living God, this heart must be diligently observ'd. Venturing upon the Appearance of Evil may lead on to great Transgressions: and remember there is such a thing as a being hardened, through the Deceitfulness of Sin. David complains, that God had hid his Face, to his great Trouble, quickly after he had said, *Lord, by thy Favour thou hast made my Mountain to stand strong, I shall not be moved. He that puts on his Harness should not boast, as he that puts it off: they know not their Danger, nor the Duty of their present Condition, who are for folding their Arms, and crying yet a little more Sleep. The Apostle reckons that it will pay Costs, if having done all we're able to do, for our Establishment, we stand. As an haughty Spirit, so a listless and slothful one, goes before a Fall. If you*

P 1 John iv. 1.

How shall we justly try Spirits or spiritual Pretences?

Answer. By the common certain Notices of the Law and Light of Nature, by the infallible Words of the Spirit in Christ, and his Apostles, and Prophets: for both these are the sure Word of God, who doth not, cannot contradict himself. Our Gifts of the Spirit are lower than the Apostles, and must be try'd by theirs which were given them to record a Rule for us. *Baxter in Loc.*
would

would not lose the good Things already wrought in you, be thrown into fluctuating Uncertainties in the great Concerns of Religion, you must walk circumspectly; as those who have a Rule, and keep their Eyes upon it. Admitting it to be only possible, that fixed as you may now seem to be, yet you may fall from your Stedfastness; the possibility of this Defection should engage you to Watchfulness; as it renders your Security not hazardous only, but extremely criminal.

Secondly, The Apostle further directs, for preventing Defections either in respect of the Faith, or Practice of the Gospel, that we should improve and advance in Grace. He had in the beginning of this Epistle, exhorted those to whom he writes, to give Diligence, to add to their Faith, Virtue; to Virtue, Knowledge; to Knowledge, Temperance; to Temperance, Patience; to Patience, Godliness; to Godliness, Brotherly-Kindness; and to Brotherly-Kindness, Charity. He mentions immediately after, as the Effects of such Attainments, Fruitfulness, and Stability; (Arguments fit to engage, and encourage a serious Mind) if these Things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall not be barren; but if you do them, ye shall never fall. In the Text he presses them to the Encrease of every Grace; that as they had Life, they should see to have it more abundantly: go on from Strength to Strength, from one degree of Grace to another, until that which is perfect was come. In general; he counsels them to be strong in the Grace of God, which is in Christ Jesus. More particularly, that they should be clothed with Humility; that they should love God, not only with pure Hearts, but fervently; that they should endeavour after a full

[Eph. v. 15. *ἀκρίβως*;

[2 Peter. i. 5, 6, 7, 8, 10.

Assurance of Hope to the End; by a strong Faith, to give Glory to God; their Joys being pure and so vigorous, as to receive no Damp from the Fig-Tree's Barrenness, or the Unfruitfulness of the Vine.

In short, he recommends not only their striving to be Partakers of all the Graces of God's Spirit, but as much of every Grace as was attainable in a tryal State; that they might *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God.*

It is not difficult to see the Influence which a Conformity to this Advice, would have upon our *Stedfastness* (the great thing at Heart, with this Apostle, for his Friends) but of this in its proper Place.

Thirdly, He further prescribes, in order to their Confirmation, their making daily Proficiency in the *Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* The Knowledge of his mysterious Person, Offices, Undertaking, Performance, Humiliation, Resurrection, Doctrine, Example, Spirit, Intercession, Kingdom, and Judgment. The Knowledge of Christ is a large, as it is a noble Theam: so copious and important, that one of the greatest among mere Men, has told us, he *determin'd to know nothing, save Jesus Christ.* From the Design of his Advice, it is plain that *Peter* had not now in his Thoughts a cold speculative inoperative Acquaintance with the Articles of the Christian's Faith, and the Precepts to which his Life is to be conform'd: but a spiritual affecting Knowledge of Christ's Gospel. He would have us, *leaving the Rudiments, or first Principles of the Doctrine of Christ, to go on to Perfection.*

To endeavour after more full and clear Light, and more of its sanctifying transforming Influence:

* Heb. vi. 1.

that we might *be chang'd into the same Image, from Glory to Glory, by the Lord the Spirit, while we behold with open Face, in his Word, as in a Glass, his Glory.*

Some are ever learning, and never come to the *Knowledge of the Truth* v. No wonder if they prove *double-minded, and unstable in all their Ways: if they are toss'd to and fro with every Wind of Doctrine, and wither away, who have no Root in them.* Search the *Scriptures*, says the Apostle, *hide God's Word in your Hearts, let it dwell more richly in you, you have not as yet attained, nor are you already perfect.* Follow on to know the Lord; to trace reveal'd Truth in its utmost Compass: labouring after further Convictions of the Reasonableness, Excellency, and Advantages of *pure and undefiled Religion.*

This alone is the Knowledge, by which we are made *wise to Salvation.*

Should you say, these are good Advices, but how do they appear to be pertinent? The Apostle is professedly aiming at the *Establishment* of these Christians in the Truths they had receiv'd, the holy, self-deny'd, and fruitful Life they had begun; but where is the Propriety of the Counsels given them? How does the exactest Observation of them tend to their *Confirmation*?

The clearing this, was the

Second Thing propos'd under this Head. For issuing this Matter, I might say

First, There is in the Nature of Things, a just Connection between these two, between the Means prescrib'd, and the End propos'd.

For Instance:

Though an unwary, a well-meaning, but less knowing Person, falls an easy Prey to him who

with *cunning Craftiness* attempts the turning him aside from the *Simplicity of the Gospel*; though he is daily expos'd to Danger, as thoughtless and secure, furnish'd only with Head Knowledge, and but poorly stock'd with this; will it follow that he is equally in Jeopardy who keeps up his Watch? Is not only in a gracious State, but a prosperous Condition as to every Grace? Is *rooted and grounded* in the Gospel Faith? knows its Articles? and lives under the Power of them? no certainly. The great Apostle *Paul* tells us, that *Watchfulness* will help us greatly to *stand fast in the Faith, and to quit our selves like Men* *; that *Grace will establish the Heart* †, though nothing else can do it: and the Adversary must make the Attack with manifest Disadvantage, when upon him who has been taught of God, *whose Understanding he has opened to understand the Scriptures*.

Again: As to Errors in *Practice*, if such who keep a jealous Eye over their own Hearts, converse with this World with a cautious Fear, make Conscience of knowing their Master's Will, and are attemper'd by his Grace to an Approbation of their Work, if these Persons are not hereby guarded against all *presumptuous Sins*, and even an Indulgence to the most *secret Faults*, none in the World are. While actually in this Posture of Mind, each may apply our Lord's Words in a qualify'd Sense, the Tempter, by Usurpation *the Prince of this World, cometh, and hath nothing in me* ‡; nothing to encourage him as to the Success of his Temptations. *I hate vain Thoughts, but God's Law do I love; I dare not do wickedly, and sin against him. I'll lay aside every Weight, the Sin*

* 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

† Heb. xiii. 9.

‡ John xiv. 30.

which doth so easily beset me, run with Patience the Race set before me ; Sin shall not reign in my mortal Body, that I should obey it in the Lusts thereof, for I am not under the Law, but under Grace. I am taught to deny all Ungodliness, and worldly Lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present World; and as an Evidence of my Uprightness, keep my self from mine own Iniquity.

But

II. Success will crown a Conformity to these Advices, by the special *Promise* of God : and that must be a very fit Prescription, for the Success of which we have such a Security.

If any Man will do his Will (says our Lord) *he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God*^a. Such shall know, *who follow on to know the Lord*^b. The Meek will he guide in Judgment, to them will he teach his Ways^c; and there is none teacheth like God. The Spirit who is the Author of the Scripture Revelation, is to abide with such for ever. They are the Temples of the living God, in virtue of his Inhabitation. How many, exceedingly great, and precious the Promises given us? How warrantable the Hopes built upon his Word, one Title of which cannot fall to the Ground unfulfilled?

We don't say that a truly gracious Person, who is careful to know, and conscientious in doing the Will of God, is *Infallible*: yet this we may say upon sufficient Ground, that either he shall not be suffer'd to fall into destructive Errors; or if he falls, he shall rise again, be recover'd from them. His Establishment is thus far at least, made certain by him *who cannot lie*.

^a John vii. 17. ^b Hosea vi. 3. ^c Psalm xxv. 9.

As to *Practical* Errors, especially the grosse^r Blemishes of Life, what reason have they, who are thorough Profelytes to these Apostolical Counsels, to hope to escape them? God has said *that he loves those that love him. That such as wait on him shall renew their Strength* (their Strength against Sin, and their Strength for the Discharge of Duty) that if they live in the daily Exercise of Faith, he'll keep them, by his mighty Power ^d. That though they are not *sinless*, yet being born of God, they shall not sin, as others, *their Seed remaining in them*, as Regenerate ^e.

Happy the People who are in such a Case: Happy the People whose God is the Lord. Who shall be so guided by his Counsel, and aided by his Spirit, as not to miss their Way, in a World where the Path's so broad, which leads to Destruction, and crowded with a Multitude that do Evil, while that is so narrow, which leads to Life, and they are so few that find it.

But I must leave this, to come to the

Third Observation. The Apostle intimates where we are to look for Success when we have done our Duty, by directing us to whom to address our Praises. To him, i. e. to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose Grace and Knowledge we are to endeavour to grow; to him be Glory, both now, and for ever, Amen.

He is the Fountain of Grace, in him we are blest'd with all spiritual Blessings, in Heavenly Things; he gives Repentance, and Remission of Sins; ^f is the Author and Finisher of our Faith: That Faith, between which, and the Blessedness of Heaven, God has declared an indissoluble Rela-

^d 1 Peter i. 5. ^e 1 John iii. 9. ^f Acts v. 31. ^g Heb. xii. 2.

tion. And why is the *Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, made to express the very best Wishes the Apostles had for their Friends, if this did not comprehend the chief Good? As he gives us every Grace, *in whom dwells the Fulness of the Godhead*, their Encrease and Perfection, by the Ministry of his Spirit; 'tis he makes Grace thus implanted and improv'd, an effectual Means for our *Preservation*: whom we are therefore to adore in its *Success*.

Suffer me to take Notice, from this State of Things, that *our Lord Jesus Christ*, as the Author of Grace, and proper Object of *Glory* (or divine Adoration) is possess'd of two as indisputable Claims to Godhead, as the human Mind can conceive: but he who leads us to this religious Homage, thoroughly understood the Reason, why *all Men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father*.

Here is no Room for the Distinction of *subordinate* Worship; nothing higher can be said where it is addressed to the *Jehovah*; none for making the Father the *prime* and *ultimate* Object, while the Son's only to be respected as the *secondary*, and less *immediate*. Here is religious Worship express'd in as lofty Terms as can be, directly presented the Son: and justly, when he is the Author of *Grace*, and has left it upon Record to the Confusion of the Enemies of his Godhead, *I, and my Father, are one* ^h.

I have now done with the *Doctrinal* Part of the Discourse, and shall

Fourthly and Lastly, make a brief practical Application.

I. Let us bless God for the Light of the Reformation. The Papists are depriv'd of the ordinary Means of *Grace*, as they are strip'd of the Means of *Knowledge*. They are held in Error, lie open to endless Cheats and Impostures. Their Teachers take from the People the *Key of Knowledge*; and lock them up in a mean slavish Dependence, on fallible erroneous designing Men: who make *Gain of Godliness*, Merchandize of Souls. If *Soundness* and Stability in the Faith, are so desirable Blessings; if to be fix'd and settled in a Course of holy Obedience, so worthy of our Ambition; if these depend upon a sanctify'd and advancing *Knowledge of Christ*, bless'd with an answerable Improvement in *Grace*; how should our Hearts melt for the numberless wretched Captives, who are in Thralldom, in the Affairs of their Souls? but let us not in pitying their complicated Misery, overlook our own Mercies.

Ours in this City, great beyond what Thousands enjoy, even in the same Land. We have *Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept*. A delightful *Variety*, as to the Methods of Instruction. Sundry *Gifts, and all for Edification*; every Man his Bible, whither to appeal for himself, so as to be *fully persuaded in his own Mind*, whether what is deliver'd from the Lord, be so or not.

In this Lecture you have had considerable Helps to furnish you for giving an *Account to him that shall enquire of the Hope that is in you*, and to qualify you for contending, in favour of the *Faith of the Gospel*: to direct you as to the *Conversation becoming this Gospel*, and encourage you to Perseverance in it. I have not in saying thus much, any eye to my self. I do sincerely profess, that I reckon my self with the *meanest* of those who have serv'd you. Yet can say, that however *unworthy,*

worthy, I have endeavour'd to be *faithful*. As I never forbore what I judged to be the Truth of God, through Fear of displeasing any; neither have I ever offer'd what appeared not to me to be such, with a view to the soothing or gratifying any Creature. Your Practice in attending to the Explication of it, shews the Esteem you have of the excellent Composure of the *Reverend Assembly of Divines at Westminster*. While I heartily approve your Judgment, I must remind you that I always endeavour'd to found your Faith of the *Doctrines* contain'd in it, upon the *Scriptures* themselves, no where short of them; and as far as I have gone in the *practical* Part, I have labour'd to convince you, that *I laid no Burden upon any Man*, which God himself did not bind upon him; leaving you after all, to judge for your selves. 'Tis therefore an unrighteous Charge, to brand all who are zealous for this *Form of sound Words*, with a Defection from *Protestant* Principles: false arguing in Fact, to make an high Regard to this Catechism, to break in upon the Reverence due to the *Oracles of God*.

You are under great Obligations to *Thankfulness*, for the Provisions made for you, in spiritual Things, in this Evening Exercise. And I would join in the Thank-Offering, that as I leave you in so good Hands, under the Instructions of my judicious and learned Father; I have Hope that *my Labours among you, have not been in vain in the Lord*.

II. Let not that Knowledge satisfy you, which is not *sanctifying*. If you only learn here to *out-talk* other People, while your *Righteousness* is far from *exceeding* theirs. This Head Knowledge will only make you more like the Devil, who is very intel-

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intelligent, yet a Devil still. Many a Man has gone down to Hell very *Orthodox*; has *thought* justly, but perished because he did not *act* accordingly. A right way of *thinking*, if it is not accompany'd with a right way of *living*, will but *greaten* our Guilt, and enflame our Reckoning. Labour for that *Knowledge*, which instead of *puffing up*, does *edify*: *purifies the Heart*, and engages us to become the *Followers of Christ*, as his dear *Children*. If we grow in *Grace*, as we grow in *Knowledge*, our Knowledge is of the saving Kind; but *could we speak with all Tongues*, and *wanted Charity*, (had Hearts utterly destitute of the Love of God) we should be but as the *sounding Brass*, and *tinckling Cymbal*.

As you wish the Reputation of this Lecture, the Glory of God, the Salvation of your Souls, see to it that your Knowledge is *practical*. That as you have received of us, how you ought to walk so as to please God, ye do abound therein more and more¹.

III. Shew the Value you set upon your present Privileges, by endeavouring to improve them, to the End of their *Confirmation* in Religion. Your Lot is cast in an evil Day. *Iniquity abounds*, the *Love of many waxes cold*. Some are carry'd about with *diverse and strange Doctrines*^k. Doctrines foreign to the Gospel, uncompliant with its Nature, and Genius. Some who seem'd to set out in the Spirit, have *weary'd of well-doing*, been led away with the *Error of the wicked*^l, of those who acted, as if they believ'd they were lawless. These Things have happened for an *Ensample*. Be wise at their Expence; take the Warning given you; be not high minded, but fear; remember that esta-

¹ 1 Thes. iv. 1. ^k Heb. xiii. 9. Διδαχῶς ποικίλης καὶ ζήτης.

² Peter iii. 17. ἁθροισμοί.

bliss'd as you may think your selves, you may be *mov'd from your Stedfastness*: may run into Errors in Judgment, and into Heresies in Practice.

If this should prove the Case as to any of you, your Defections will do vast Discredit to Religion, as your Sin will contract uncommon Heinousness from the Advantages you enjoy.

Youth is a Season of Life in which we are most in Danger of being *vain, conceited, proud, unsteady*; as these are Sins in themselves, so they will expose to very many more. We must know our Danger to avoid it; and you see I deal with the Plainness and Faithfulness of a Friend. God *resists the Proud, but gives Grace to the Humble*. If in attending this Exercise, you are sensible of your remaining Darkness, and thankful for your Helps to cure it; you shall find your Acquaintance with divine Things, as the *Morning Light* which gradually encreases to the *perfect Day*.

You'll attain what the Apostle calls *all Riches of the full Assurance of Understanding, to the Acknowledgment of the Mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ*^a. It is not a small Mercy that while *others make Shipwrack of the Faith*, which is often attended with the *shipwrecking* a *good Conscience*, you have a sound and settled Judgment in the Scripture Doctrines; and if with a becoming Temper of Mind, you go on to receive the Instructions given you here, you don't un-

^a Col. ii. 2. *πληροφωρία* signifies a filling, fulfilling, fulness, but of what the subject Matter must declare. Here it signifies Fulness of the Understanding of the Gospel. *i. e.* a Knowledge of more Propositions, whether Principles or Consequents, and a greater Firmness and Clearness of Persuasion. Riches of Fulness includes both Bp. Fell. in *Loc.*

warrantably hope that God will thus bless them to you.

Again, see that these Helps are improved to your Establishment in serious *practical* Godliness. That your Lives may be an even, continued *Walk with God*. For then only are we *his Friends*, when we hold on, *doing whatsoever he commands*. You have set out well, *forgetting the Things that are behind, press forward toward the Mark*. You must *endure to the End if you wou'd be saved*.

I shall quickly have done, therefore

IV. Habituate your Minds to think of the Certainty, and Nearness of *Christ's coming*. Faith can antedate the awful Catastrophe, and represent to the Mind in an affecting Light, *the Heavens passing away with a great Noise, the Elements melting with fervent Heat, the Earth, and the Works of it burning, and the compleat Dissolution of the whole Frame of Nature*. it will make us other sort of Persons than we are, in *all holy Conversation and Godliness*, to live under realizing Apprehensions of the account we must give, to him that shall *judge the World in Righteousness*. We shall carefully avoid whatever wou'd then distress us, and cause that we should give up that *Account with Grief* instead of *Joy*. Let not Youth, Health, Strength, tempt you to a Forgetfulness of Death and Judgment. There's no Inconsistency between conversing daily with the Grave, and having the truest Enjoyment of the present Life. Such only are happy, who are prepared for all Events. And if we die daily, are *daily looking for, and hasting to the coming of the Day of God, for us to live will be Christ, and to die will be Gain*.

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You

You will find a believing Regard to the Redeemer's second coming, a powerful Motive to universal Holiness. What will contribute more than a little to your *Stability* in the Faith and Obedience of the Gospel.

Fifthly and Lastly, be a *praying Society*, if you wou'd have the Exercise you attend blest to saving Purposes. Such as would *build up themselves in their holy Faith, must pray in the Holy Ghost*. Paul may plant, Apollos water, but the *Excrease comes from God*. And for this he will be enquired of. Pray each of you for your selves, that God would help you to *grow in Grace, as you do in Knowledge*. Pray for your Ministers, that they may always come to you in the *Abundance of the Blessings of the Gospel of Peace*. Pray each for other, and then *hope in God's Mercy*; that he will on all these Occasions *fill his House with his Glory*; that there may not be wanting of your Society who shall be *reckoned to the Lord for a Generation*.

Finally, my beloved Brethren, may the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant you, according to the Riches of his Glory, to be strengthened with Might by his Spirit, in the inner Man; that Christ may dwell in your Hearts by Faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in Love, may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the Breadth, and Length, and Depth, and Height, and to know the Love of Christ, which passes Knowledge. May you all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of this Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ: that ye be no more Children, tossed to and fro,

*fro, and carry'd about with every Wind of Doctrine,
by the slight of Men, and cunning Craftiness where-
by they lie in Wait to deceive : but speaking the
Truth in Love may grow up into him in all Things,
which is the Head, even Christ.*

*To him be Glory, both now, and for ever.
Amen.*

F I N I S.





